

## FREE CLIENT GUIDE

# Sports Massage: Performance, Prevention and Recovery

By the ProMasseurs editorial team | Updated September 26, 2026 | 6 min read

Sports massage is built around training and competition. This guide covers how it supports performance, the role it can play in injury prevention, and how pre-event, post-event and maintenance sessions differ.

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## SECTION 01

## Athletic Performance

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Sports massage is a style of massage designed around physical activity. It borrows techniques from Swedish and deep tissue massage but applies them with a training plan in mind: which muscles are working hardest, where the athlete feels restricted, and what is coming up on the calendar. Runners, cyclists, lifters, swimmers, team-sport players and weekend athletes all use it.

Many athletes find that regular massage helps them feel looser, move through a fuller range of motion and notice tight spots before they become a problem. It works best as one part of a routine that also includes sleep, nutrition, warm-ups and sensible training load, rather than as a shortcut to performance.

## SECTION 02

## Injury Prevention

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A skilled sports massage therapist pays close attention to imbalances and areas that are repeatedly tight, such as the calves and hamstrings in runners or the shoulders in swimmers. Spotting these patterns early gives the athlete a chance to adjust training, add mobility work or see a physiotherapist before a minor niggle becomes an injury.

Massage is not a treatment for acute injuries. If you have a new sprain, strain, swelling or sharp pain, get it assessed by a medical professional first. Once you are cleared, massage can be a useful part of the return-to-training phase.

## SECTION 03

## Recovery Protocols

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Recovery-focused sessions are usually scheduled after hard training blocks or long efforts. The therapist uses moderate pressure, broad strokes and gentle stretching to help the athlete feel less stiff and more ready for the next session. Many athletes report less perceived soreness afterwards, although the effect varies.

A simple maintenance rhythm works for most people: one session every one to four weeks during regular training, with extra sessions around key events. Keep notes on how you feel in the days after each session so you and your therapist can fine-tune timing and pressure.

## SECTION 04

## Pre-Event

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A pre-event massage is short, usually 15 to 30 minutes, and given anywhere from a few hours to a day before competition. The goal is to feel warm, loose and ready, not sore. Strokes are brisk and rhythmic, and deep, intense work is avoided because it can leave muscles feeling heavy.

Never try a new therapist or a new type of massage right before an important event. Book pre-event sessions with someone who already knows your body, and keep the pressure light to moderate.

## SECTION 05

## Post-Event

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After competition the body needs time to settle. A post-event massage is usually given from an hour to a couple of days after the event, once breathing and heart rate have returned to normal. Pressure is gentle, with slow flushing strokes and light stretching rather than deep work.

Drink water, eat and cool down properly first. Wait longer before any deep tissue work, typically 48 to 72 hours after a very hard effort such as a marathon, and skip massage over any area that feels injured, hot or swollen.

### Key takeaways

- Sports massage is planned around your training and event calendar.
- Pre-event sessions are short, brisk and light, never deep.
- Post-event sessions are gentle; save deep work for two to three days later.
- Regular maintenance sessions help you notice tight spots early.
- New or acute injuries should be assessed medically before massage.

## Frequently asked questions

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**When should I get a sports massage before a race?**

Most athletes book a short, light session one to two days before, or a brief warm-up massage on the day. Avoid deep work right before competing.

**Can sports massage help with muscle soreness?**

Many athletes report feeling less sore and stiff after a recovery session, though results vary. Rest, sleep and nutrition still matter most.

**Do I need to be an athlete to book a sports massage?**

No. Anyone who trains regularly, from gym-goers to weekend hikers, can benefit from a session focused on the muscles they use most.

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This guide is general information, not medical advice. Speak to a doctor before booking a massage if you have an injury, a medical condition or are unsure whether massage is right for you.